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WHIP AT-LARGE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2101

Are you interested in...

*reducing the demand for foreign oil?
improving fuel efficiency?
promoting smart environmental policy?*

Sign the Boehlert-Dicks-Greenwood-Waxman letter on CAFE Standards

I commend your attention to the editorial from *The Washington Post* that is reprinted on the reverse side of this page. In the 1970s, when Congress passed laws to promote fuel efficiency and cleaner air, light trucks and Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) were but a fraction of the market. They were not held to the same Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards as cars, which have become cleaner and more efficient without sacrificing price, power, safety or performance. Today, sales of trucks and SUVs have tripled, occupying about 50% of the market share and providing a disincentive for manufacturers to improve the consumer and environmental quality of new vehicles.

Degradation of the environment has accelerated under the outdated laws. Light trucks and SUVs produce, on average, 47% more harmful pollutants than cars. Because lower standards apply to light trucks and SUVs, as much as 237 million tons of global warming gases are needlessly emitted each year. This heavy usage of oil and gas leads to increased dependence on imports and increased exposure to the kind of price spikes that occurred this Winter.

Instead of examining this outdated policy, Congress has restricted the Department of Transportation from even studying the issue. The so-called CAFE-freeze rider has been included in the Transportation Appropriations bill since 1995. While there are many sides to the debate, a gag rider is never responsible public policy.

If you agree, join me and over 80 of your colleagues by signing the Boehlert-Dicks-Greenwood-Waxman letter asking the President to work with Congress to eliminate the CAFE-freeze rider. To sign the letter, you can contact Greg Dotson at 5-3976 in the office of Rep. Henry Waxman. If you have further questions about this issue, feel free to contact my office, or have your staff contact Peter Irvine of my staff at 5-5335.

Sincerely,



JOHN W. OLVER
Member of Congress

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Saving Gas, and the Planet

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IN THE NEXT few weeks Congress will have a chance to combat both global warming and U.S. dependence on foreign oil. For each of the past five years, in funding the Transportation Department, Congress has blocked any change in regulations that hold SUVs, minivans and pickup trucks to a lower standard of fuel efficiency than passenger cars. It's time to get rid of that restriction.

In 1975 Congress passed a law requiring new vehicles sold in the United States to meet fuel efficiency standards. At the time light trucks were a small portion of the market, and standards for them were set lower than those for passenger vehicles. But now SUVs, minivans and other light trucks account for nearly half the new vehicles sold. As they claim a larger and larger share of the market, while still being held to a lower standard, the average fuel efficiency of the new-car fleet declines. Last year it hit its lowest point since 1980.

In December the EPA issued new rules requiring light trucks to meet the same tight emissions standards as cars. These regulations will sharply reduce smog-producing pollutants. But the emissions standards don't affect carbon dioxide, a major contributor to global warming. One fifth of the total U.S. carbon dioxide output comes from car and light truck emissions, and the way to reduce it is to reduce the amount of fuel burned--that is, to increase efficiency.

Auto makers argue that the best way to do so is to rely on advanced technology--hybrid gas, electric cars--that manufacturers are already developing and, in some cases, beginning to sell. Those cars should eventually offer big gains, but in the meantime, according to the EPA, efficient technology that has already been added to the light truck fleet is being used to support more weight and higher acceleration instead of more miles per gallon. It's time now for Congress to take the handcuffs off and allow appropriate new standards.